

The National Tribune

A Monthly Journal devoted to the interests of the Soldiers and Sailors of the late war, and all Pensioners of the United States.

Published by The
NATIONAL TRIBUNE COMPANY.

VOL. III, No. 10.

WASHINGTON, D. C., OCTOBER, 1879.

TERMS, FIFTY CENTS PER YEAR.
Specimen Copies sent Free on Request.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year of our Lord, 1879, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington, D. C.

Art Thou Living Yet?

BY JAMES G. CLARK.

[The following sweet tribute to a mother's memory is full of tender meaning, and is worthy of the poet-singer that wrote it.]

Is there no grand, immortal sphere
Beyond this vale of broken ties,
To fill the wants that mock us here,
And dry the tears from weeping eyes;
Where winter melts in endless spring,
And June stands near with deathless flowers;
Where we may hear the dear ones sing
Who loved us in this world of ours?
I ask, and lo! my cheeks are wet
With tears for one I cannot see;
Oh, mother, art thou living yet,
And dost thou still remember me?

I feel thy kisses o'er me thrill,
Thou unseen angel of my life;
I hear thy hymns around me thrill
An undertone of care and strife;
Thy tender eyes upon me shine,
As from a being glorified,
Till I am thine and thou art mine,
And I forget that thou hast died;
I almost lose each vain regret
In vision of a life to be;
But, mother, art thou living yet,
And dost thou still remember me?

The springtimes bloom, the summers fade,
The winters blow along the way;
But over every light or shade
Thy memory lives by night and day;
It soothes to sleep my wildest pain,
Like some sweet song that cannot die,
And, like the murmur of the main,
Grows deeper when the storm is high.
I know the brightest stars that set
Return to bless the yearning sea;
But, mother, art thou living yet,
And dost thou still remember me?

I sometimes think thy soul comes back
From o'er the dark and silent stream,
Where last we watched thy shining track,
To those green hills of which we dream;
Thy loving arms around me twine,
My cheeks bloom younger in thy breath,
Till thou art mine and I am thine,
Without a thought of pain or death.
And yet, at times, my eyes are wet
With tears for her I cannot see—
Oh, mother, art thou living yet,
And dost thou still remember me?

JACK'S GREAT PERIL.

A STARTLING STORY OF A RAILROAD ADVENTURE.

I never saw such a change in a man in my life! When we last met, Jack—well, I must not give his real name, considering what I am going to relate, so I'll call him Jack Pallant—was, as he had ever been since I knew him, one of the lightest-hearted, cheeriest fellows in the world, full of fun, and up to everything, and gentle and tender as a woman, with the courage of a lion. And now, what did I find him? Even though but three months had elapsed, he had become a grave, dejected, saddened man—in a word, hardly recognizable, either mentally or physically. I was shocked, and of course he saw that I was. He came to see me, indeed, the moment he heard I was in town, that I might learn from his own mouth what had happened, instead of at second-hand.

Jack had always been more or less a spoiled boy—only sons are always more or less spoiled—and having lost his mother when quite a child, it was not wonderful that his poor old dad made much of him. But he had taken the spoiling kindly, and beyond making him perhaps a little idle and thoughtless, it had done him no harm. There was no harm in the fellow; he spent more money than he should, but many young soldiers do that without coming to much grief in the long run, and his father, a soldier before him, regarded the falling leniently, paid his bills, and looked pleasant. Beyond adding that he was a rather short, dapper little fellow, I need not say much more about him; I have only to try and put into coherent shape the strange and tragic business which had so fearfully altered him.

He was coming to town one autumn evening for a few days' leave from Gunnersholt, where he was quartered. I can see him as plainly as if I had been there, springing into the first carriage that offered room, without regard to who was in it; for he was the least fastidious of men, without the slightest particle of "haw-haw" pride and nonsense, or that stand offishness of manner, too usual with men in his position; ready to make himself happy wherever he was, or in whatever company.

But it so happened, it appears, on this occasion that he got into an empty carriage, at least he thought so, for it was twilight, and he did not observe for the first moment the figure of a woman, seated in a further corner, dressed in dark clothes and thickly veiled.

The sudden discovery that he was not alone rather startled him for a moment, and it may be, as he said, that the evening before having been a guest night at mess his nerves were not quite up to their usual tone. He was not the lad, however, to be long in such a situation without making some remark to his fellow-traveler, though in this case an unusual hesitation to do so came over him, owing to her mysterious appearance and extreme stillness. The between-lights of the carriage lamp and the evening sky prevented him from discerning details, but there she sat, perfectly rigid, and with not a vestige of her face visible through the thick black veil.

"Ahem! ahem!" he said, at last, shifting one seat nearer to her and nearly opposite; "I hope I have not intruded on you; I thought the carriage was empty. I

may be disturbing you, I fear." He would say anything in a random sort of way, to break the ice as he called it.

No answer. A long pause. Very singular, he thought; and he moved to a seat exactly opposite the figure, making another commonplace observation. No response or any movement.

"Asleep, I suppose," he said to himself; and he sat watching her while the train rattled on for a mile or two. A station was reached and a stoppage made, with the usual accompaniments of screech and whistling, and slamming of doors, but without producing any change in the occupant of the opposite corner. The train moved on. "Can't be asleep," he muttered, "what's the matter with her?"

The window was shut close; he let it down with a tremendous clatter and bang, remarking that "he hoped, as the evening was fine, the weather warm, and the carriage close," (for he declared to me there was a peculiar odor hanging about which struck him from the first), "she would not object to a little air."

Still no reply. Then he said "he feared she was not well; would she like him to ring the bell for the guard, and have the train stopped again?" But nothing he could say or do elicited any sign of life from her.

Jack now became seriously alarmed and uncomfortable on her account. He thought she could not be asleep, but had fainted. Suddenly it crossed his mind that she was dead. Night had now closed in, but as the last tinge of daylight faded from the sky, the carriage lamp gained its full power and revealed every object more plainly than hitherto.

Jack leaned toward the motionless form. A long black veil, falling from a close-fitting hat-like bonnet, enveloped nearly the whole upper part of her figure; indeed, on close inspection, it hardly looked like an ordinary veil, but more like a large black silk handkerchief. Her dress was of common black stuff, much worn and frayed, from amid the folds of which appeared the ends of a piece of rope that must have been fastened round her waist; and one hand, incased in an old, fitting black glove, lay placidly on her lap.

Full of unpleasant sensations, Jack was about to lift the veil when, for the first time, the figure moved; its other hand stole slowly from beneath the folds of the dress, and the veil was gradually lifted and thrown up over the head.

Involuntarily my friend shrank back into the corner of his seat, for a face was revealed to him which no one could have looked upon without a sense of awe. It was that of a woman somewhat past middle age, thin, haggard, and pale, to a degree which only death could parallel. The features, finely chiseled and proportioned, showed that at one time there must have been supreme beauty; while, though the iron-gray hair looked a little disheveled and unkempt, the glance of the eye was steady, calm, and determined.

In this glance lay, chiefly, the awe-inspiring expression of the face, for, in addition to the penetrating look, there was a persistency in it, and at the same time a fascination, quite terrible. It fixed itself upon Jack from the first moment that eye met eye, and for several minutes not a word was spoken on either side. Presently, however, he tried to pull himself together and to assume his usual light-hearted manner, which had thus for a minute been so strangely and unusually disturbed, and he said, briskly: "I beg your pardon; I was afraid you were ill."

She slightly bent her head, but spoke not a word nor withdrew her glance.

He felt more and more that it was causing him an effort to be himself. Her slow, stealthy, albeit ladylike demeanor added greatly to the effect already produced, and a curious sensation was gradually creeping over him that—impossible as it might seem—that face was not strange to him. Little as he, with his temperament, was given to speculation or introspection, he found himself striving to look back for some event or circumstance in his life which might give him a clue. Had he ever dreamed of such a face, or had he seen it in childhood? He was puzzled, affected, quite put out. And still the deep, penetrating eyes were fixed on his, piercing, as it were, into his very soul. And the hands!—what were they doing? Taking off the gloves as with a set, deliberate purpose; and the long, white, thin, almost claw-like fingers worked strangely and nervously, slowly closing and opening upon the palm, as if to grasp something.

Again he strove to throw off the unpleasant, unusual sensation which had crept over him.

"I can't stand this," he thought; "I was never so uncomfortable in my life! I must do something or say something to put a stop to this, to make her take her eyes off me!"

He moved abruptly to the farther corner of the carriage, and to the same side on which the woman sat.

"I'll try and dodge her in this way," he said to himself; she shall not sit and glare at me in this fashion!"

But she, too, immediately shifted her place, and rising to her full height, which was very great, went over to the seat exactly opposite to him, never for one single second dropping her eyes from his. He looked out of the window with a vague notion of getting out of the carriage; which suddenly passing a little station which he recognized, but at which the train did not stop, an idea struck him—an idea after his own heart—a comic idea! He availed himself of it on the instant, and assuming an ease which doubtless sat ill upon him, and which he was far from feeling, he pointed with his thumb back toward the

station they had just passed, as he said mysteriously in a hollow voice:

"Do you know that place?"

She seemed to answer in the affirmative by a slight inclination of the head as before.

"Ah! you do. Good! Langmoor," he went on; "then I don't mind telling you a secret." He paused. (I'll frighten her, he thought.) "Criminal lunatics," he said aloud; "I am one of them. I have just escaped from there!"

"So have I!"

With what had already gone before, this put the finishing touch to Jack's uneasiness of mind. It was not as he said, the mere presence of the woman or the revelation that his joke had elicited, which scared him, though the circumstance in itself might be unpleasant enough.

"I should have faced it right away from the first, as any man would have done, had it not been for the remarkable influence her face and look had upon me; that unaccountable feeling that she was no stranger to me it was, that unnerved and even appalled me."

No sooner had she uttered the words "So have I," than Jack sprang to the cord communicating with the guard's van, for he felt their truth, and saw in them a key to the whole mystery. But ere his hand had reached the cord she had seized him round the waist with one arm as with the grip of a vise, and at the same instant he felt one of those terrible hands at his throat.

Every effort to release himself was fruitless; her strength seemed superhuman, and was as far beyond his as was her stature. Her face glowered close down upon his now, still with the same fell expression.

"The only thing I could have done," went on Jack, in describing the scene to me—and just here he shall speak for himself; "the only means by which I might perhaps have made her relax her hold would have been by aiming one or two tremendous blows with my right fist (which was at liberty) at her face. Had it been a man's, there would have been no hesitation; had it been indeed that of an ordinary woman, at such a pass I should not have hesitated to strike her to stun her, if I could, by any means; but that face, that I seemed to know so well, yet so mysteriously, I could not raise my hand against it, and, as my arm swung up with the first impulse to deal her a blow, it fell helpless by my side. Vain were my efforts to get her hand away from my throat; there was a terrible swaying to and fro for a minute or two, I felt the grip of the long fingers tightening, and myself choking. Suddenly we fell—there was a fearful jerk or two, a strange upheaving of the floor, a tremendous rattle and crash—I appeared to be thrown headlong to some great distance, and—all was darkness!"

The termination of that deadly struggle was brought about in a manner as marvelous and unlooked for as could well have been imagined.

Some fifty souls, say, were traveling in that train, all save one in perfect security. Jack's life alone was in danger, when lo! by one of those marvelous coincidences which do happen at times in the supreme moments of existence, the rescue came, but at the cost of many a life, which just before would have seemed worth treble the purchase of Jack's.

At the very instant that his might have depended upon another tightening grip or two from the hands of a maniac, a frightful catastrophe occurred to the train. The tire of an engine-wheel broke, and half a dozen carriages were hurled down a steep embankment. The scene that succeeded is, unhappily, of too common an occurrence to need more than a word of reference here. Seven passengers were killed outright; double that number slightly badly hurt; the remainder escaping, as by a miracle, with nothing else than a severe shock.

My friend was among the shaken. He had been thrown clear of the debris on to a soft grassy spot, half bank, half hedge; emphatically, his life was saved!

But what followed it was that which caused the suffering, that wrought the terrible change in Jack.

In the darkness of that soft autumn night he strove, foremost among those who had been spared, to render such help as was possible to the less fortunate. When the official assistance came, and fires were set blazing to give light, almost his first care was to try and seek out his dangerous fellow-traveler. In the confusion nobody was prepared, of course, to listen to Jack's account of her, even had he been prepared then to give it. She was not, evidently, moving about among the crowd; he assured himself of that; but supposing her, like himself, to have escaped injury, (and he concluded that this was likely), might she not, with the stealth and cunning incidental to her malady, be hiding, and by thus further eluding detection, become, with her homicidal mania, as dangerous to the community at large as some fierce, wild animal would be? The thought made him shudder; he must lose no time in assuring himself of her fate.

As soon as an approach to order could be evolved out of that awful chaos, he had convinced himself that she was not among the injured. Then he turned to the dead. His eye fell upon several mutilated and motionless forms, which had been laid in an ominous row at the foot of one part of the embankment. Hers was not among them; he could find no trace of her.

At length, as a sickly dawn was beginning to make the search easier, he endeavored to discover the spot where the carriage he had occupied had fallen, and to retrace his steps (quite to the rear of the train, by the way) to the place where he found himself lying after the catastrophe.